



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE FUNCTION OF THE DEBATING SOCIETY OR HIGH-SCHOOL LYCEUM.

FOR the past few years instruction in English has been demanding deserved attention, and now is beginning to receive adequate treatment. Many courses of study have been completely changed in order that the study of English may be continuous, the time at its disposal lengthened and its demands made more exacting. While every instructor is supposed to be a teacher of English and to be constantly on the alert to correct each and every slip of tongue or pen, there is now *the* teacher of English in every well-regulated school. However, the introduction of this departmental teaching seems to have lessened the feeling of responsibility which the rest of the corps formerly assumed. Now they too often simply mention to the pupil his most glaring faults of oral expression and relegate to this recently installed department the task of purifying the streams of poor English which daily deluge their written exercises.

Ample provision is thus being made to improve the written efforts of the youth, but of late has due attention been given to their spoken utterances? It is extremely difficult to obtain from pupils spontaneity and copiousness, even when they are furnished with pen and paper, and there is nothing to disturb the action of their mind or the flow of their language. Arduous as it is for them to write out their few struggling thoughts, their attempts to think logically and to speak coherently and correctly when on their feet are well nigh futile.

Our treatment of these young people strongly resembles that of the eagle towards her young. We feed them with a varied diet of rules, examples and theories, and then send them forth with the expectation that they can soar to any height of eloquence. The result is very similar to the first attempts of the eaglet, but with this marked difference. Very few are tempted to imitate its persistency and so acquire its proficiency.

There never was a time when the man or woman who can talk was in such demand. His services are called into requisition upon all sorts of occasions. At the club, in his community, in the halls of legislation, wherever men congregate he is a power and a leader. The ready and convincing speaker is sure of a following, and his addresses are paving the way for his political or social preferment. However, the vast majority of people are afraid of the sound of their own voices. Their inability to speak at length is only too apparent, so weak are their attempts and futile their efforts. The excuse invariably is that they have received no training in the principles and practice of public speaking.

Are we as teachers doing all we can to enable our graduates to fill that position in the community which their education entitles them to hold? If this readiness and fluency of speech are so desirable, what means can we employ that our pupils may become proficient speakers? This facility is not acquired in the class room. The brief and fragmentary character of the pupil's replies is truly lamentable. If they are at all diffuse, they are usually a repetition of the exact language of the text, or a rearrangement of the clauses and phrases of the printed page. The demand that recitations, so far as practicable, be conducted topically and all replies expressed in paragraphs, not in short naked sentences, will do much to help the pupil.

However, rhetorical exercises in connection with debating societies or a lyceum alone afford the students the needed opportunity for and practice in speaking. These exercises should occur at regular and frequent intervals, upon such a school day that the participants will be at their best physically and mentally and the audience appreciative and attentive, and at such an hour that the friends of the school will find it convenient to attend. Their character will be influenced by the size of the school and its teaching force, the notions of its principal, and the needs of the school. If the membership of the school will warrant it, this work may be carried on under the direction of its lyceum. If not, the rhetorical work may be apportioned among the several teachers and the lyceum, comprising the whole student body, may meet less frequently.

If this scheme is not desirable, each class might form a lyceum and thus gain the advantages to be derived from such an organization. Should no time be found during the school session for this important subject, debating societies and secret organizations with more or less euphonious Greek names may be advisable, but unless subject to school authority they are not easily managed, and as their membership is constantly changing they are extremely liable to deteriorate. Certainly each school can support an organization, which shall have for its main purpose the training of its members in *declamation, debate, and parliamentary practice.*

No better comment upon the neglect and the desirableness of declamation can be adduced than the following newspaper clipping, as apposite now as when written six years ago.

The older generation inclines to think that a great mistake is being made by some of the promising undergraduates of our public schools in losing their interest in public declamation. This honorable and stimulating exercise is useful in many ways: It brings to the attention of students some of the best excerpts of a splendid literature; it fixes in plastic memories lines that it will be forever a pleasure to recall; it imparts a confidence and ease in facing collective bodies that no other experience of youth supplies; it teaches grace of bearing and attractive enunciation of language; in short, the argument is all for the continuance of a good scholastic custom, and there is nothing that can be brought against it. So let not the good work die of inanition, but rather allow it more scope and lay upon it more stress than in these days has become a custom.

When through a course in declamation his natural diffidence has been overcome and self-reliance acquired, the student is ready to begin argumentation. He can commence and gain practice in his own rhetorical division and afterwards participate in the general discussions of the lyceum. When he has gained the ability to outline his question logically, post his supporters, marshal and arrange his arguments in concise yet convincing terms, and meet successfully the points of his opponents, he has an acquisition that will stand him in good stead in his future career. There is nothing like a debate to arouse the latent powers, to quicken thought, and to call forth our best expression. Young men are very proud of their physical

prowess and are constantly vying with each other in feasts of strength. Why should they not show the same zeal in mental contests?

The conduct of these debates necessitates time and thought on the part of the teacher, but they can be so managed that pupils will prefer them to declamations, and so varied that interest in them will not wane. Three books have recently been published that will be especially helpful to those interested in this subject: *The Principles of Argumentation*, published by Ginn & Co.; *Briefs for Debate*, by Longmans, Green & Co.; and Craig's *Pros and Cons*. To encourage the students the reference library should contain helpful books on speaking, for instance, Higginson's *Hints on Speech-Making*; Pittenger's *Debating, How to Become a Public Speaker, Extempore Speech*; Beecher's *Oratory*; and Smith's *Reading and Speaking*.

The knowledge of parliamentary procedure, which members of a lyceum may gain, even if they receive no other benefits, is well worth the time spent. In these days, when there are clubs and societies of every conceivable sort with every imaginable name, having a more or less formal organization, it is very necessary that someone be informed in regard to the rules governing such bodies. The one who is conversant with them at once acquires a marked prestige and is looked upon as a mentor.

While students are not apt to be captious, hardly a month will pass that some mooted question arising in class room or lyceum will not be brought to the principal for settlement. They will watch the rulings of presiding officers and eagerly report any divergency from parliamentary practice. Usually the first act of a newly elected president will be to secure possession of a manual and thoroughly inform himself for future emergencies. The other officers will become acquainted with the duties of their respective offices and learn the proper manner of making reports and the routine of business. The members of the various committees appointed during the year likewise gain valuable experience through the responsibilities assumed. Men of affairs in the community will testify to the practical value of

this training, and students who enter higher institutions will express surprise at the lack of information of their classmates and regret at the careless manner in which business is transacted. Indeed, so important is this subject becoming that wherever the application of its rules is not gained by actual practice, some time should be devoted to it as a general exercise or a class-room topic, based upon such a book as Robert's *Parliamentary Syllabus*.

The programs of the lyceum should be so varied that they will both interest the school and attract the friends of the pupils. They may consist of readings, recitations, declamations, essays, original stories, school papers, stump speeches, orations, debates, town-meetings, mock trials, sessions of congress and the legislature, dialogues, plays, addresses, etc., interspersed with piano solos and duets, orchestral and vocal selections.

But the lyceum has another function besides those already mentioned. It can be made the center of the social life of the school. It can help create a loyal spirit. It can engage in many helpful enterprises. Its prize speaking contests or entertainments may help decorate the walls of the building, replenish the library, or add to the scientific apparatus. Under its auspices a school paper may be published or catalogue or a history of the school issued. When the public makes some demand upon the school, the lyceum stands ready to render its assistance. Thus while its members are constantly receiving benefits they can also learn the blessedness of giving.

The work of the lyceum as thus outlined will require extra exertions on the part of the regular teachers. Ideal conditions will not arise and the best results be attained until a special teacher in vocal culture is employed, who will take the entire charge of the rhetorical exercises. Let not this present lack of suitable instruction, however, deter anyone from inaugurating some literary society, which shall have for its aim the mental moral, and social improvement of its members, for its influence will be most beneficial.

The lyceum can and should hold such a place among the other exercises of the school and create such an interest that the

students will look forward to its meeting with eager expectancy, that the loyalty and devotion of the graduates will continue undiminished, because of the practical help that it gave them, and the community will be induced to give the school its cordial support.

H. W. KITTREDGE.

WESTFIELD, MASS., HIGH SCHOOL.